(a) whether Government have taken any steps to protect the domestic industry while signing the Free Trade Agreements at the Bangkok Summit held recently;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) During the first BIMST-EC Summit held on 31st July, 2004 in Bangkok no Free Trade Agreement was signed by the Government.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Export of Tiger Prawn

1962. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a great demand for tiger prawn abroad; and

(b) if so, the measures taken to train farmers on the methods of producing high quality prawn and tap the increasing demand for prawn especially in Japan, U.K. and the U.S. to boost exports?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a)Yes, Sir.

(b) In order to promote the concept of sustainable shrimp farming among the farmers, the marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) is regularly conducting training programmes, workshops, farmers meets, campaigns, etc. MPEDA has been engaged in an active campaign against the abuse of antibiotics in aquaculture and is popularizing innovative farming methods to ensure disease-free farming without the usage of banned drugs and chemicals. A separate scheme to increase shrimp production through aquaculture is also being implemented. Considering the huge prospects, MPEDA has established Regional and Sub-Regional Centres in various maritime States to promote shrimp culture.

Apart from the above, several steps are also being taken by the Government for boosting the exports of marine products, including prawn.

These include schemes for extending financial assistance to the seafood processing industry, steps to upgrade processing facilities to meet international standards of hygiene and quality; expansion of aquaculture; assistance to produce value-added products for export; marketing support etc.

Waivers for statutory requirements

1963. SHRI ABANI ROY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the reasons due to which several Export Promotion Councils and Trade Associations have been permitted to waive statutory requirements;

(b) if so, the details of such waivers allowed during the last three years, year-wise; and

(c) whether Government are aware that such waivers lead to concentration of power in hands of few persons and democratic process is broken?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) The Export Promotion Councils have been permitted, with the approval of the Government, to make amendments in the articles/bye-laws in order to effect their smooth functioning.

(b) The Government have been approval to the amendments in the articles/bye-laws of the Export Promotion Councils, during the last three years as indicated below:

Year	Number of Amendments
2001-02	55
2002-03	9
2003-04	1

(c) Any departure from the established procedure by way of amendments to be carried out in the bye-laws requires Government's approval before giving effect. The Government examines the requests of the Councils for amendments in the bye-laws and approve them keeping